

## “Disciples, Do Not Fear”

**Matthew 10:26-31**

**August 3, 2025**

As I studied about and prayed over the Biblical text for today, I realized something. I have always looked at the “do not fear” and “do not be afraid” passages in the Bible as words of **command**---you know, the “do not” part of them especially. But recently, I have also learned to look at them another way. What if they are really not commands, but promises? Preacher David Lose<sup>1</sup> writes of the text:

*If this passage were a poem, the form would be A-B-A. Or, in this case, Promise-Warning-Promise.*

*First comes the **promise**: do not fear. This is one of the signature formulations of the Gospel throughout the Scriptures, as anytime an angel or prophet or messenger begins with these words, we know that what is to come is sheer good news. Do not fear those who will oppose you, Jesus says, in time the truth will out. In the meantime, we are commissioned to tell what we have seen and heard and experienced with confidence and joy.*

*Then **warning**: Even the most powerful worldly authorities cannot touch your soul or affect your eternal destiny. God alone can do that. And so*

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<sup>1</sup> David Lose, “In the Meantime.”

*all fear – more in the sense of holy awe than terror, mind you – should be directed to God, not to worldly powers.*

*And then **promise**: Because this is true – God is the one who has power over both our immediate and eternal lives – we should know that God values and loves us above all things. God, in fact, loves the whole creation and reserves particular attention and affection for those created in God’s own likeness.*

*Promise, warning, promise. Good words for disciples about to go out on a mission, today just as much as then.*

Wow. I love that! “Do not fear” is not so much a **command** I have to obey as it is a **promise** for me to trust in.

Preacher Paul Stratman<sup>2</sup> sees it that way, too. He writes:  
*Don’t be afraid. It’s a sweet sentence that flows through the scripture. “Don’t be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward!”*

*At the Red Sea Moses told Israel, “Do not be afraid. You will never see these Egyptians again” . When Moses died, God said to Joshua “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” King David responded to the Good Shepherd’s love by saying “I will fear no evil for you are with me”*

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Stratman, “Don’t Be Afraid.”

*God spoke to his people through Isaiah, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand”*

*Now as Jesus sends his disciples out with the Gospel that the Messiah has come and is the fulfillment of all God had promised, Jesus says it again. “Don’t be afraid.”*

*Why does God say that so often? Why does Jesus say it to the disciples? Why does it sound so good to our ears? “Don’t be afraid.” It’s because the world is a fearful place. After Adam and Eve’s fall, sin was in the world, and with sin, death, destruction, threats, and fear.*

*Abraham was in a strange land. He felt alone. He felt like his life was at a dead end. That’s when God said, “Don’t be afraid.”*

*Joshua had just taken over from Moses. He was to be the leader of a great nation. He faced a land full of Canaanites and Philistines—peoples who didn’t know God and who did unspeakable things to their own people (even their own children). So God said, “Don’t be afraid.”*

*The disciples were about to proclaim Christ to some people who were content with the Old Testament and their old ways and didn’t want a Savior. They were going to face some people who wanted a Savior who would be a revolutionary to drive out the Romans. They were going to face some people who wanted to live as they pleased. They were going to face opposition, anger, hatred, threats—and later would face*

*authorities, punishment and death for sharing the gospel. To them Jesus says, “Don’t be afraid.” For the people of God living in a sinful world, it will always be a battle against forces in the world. For the people of God who have a broken human nature, there will always be battles against fear within.*

I think that the best thing you can do for someone in fear is not to fight, and not to flee, and not to try to explain it. The best thing you can do is be with them and let them know you care. God knows this. Sometimes there is no explanation for when bad things happen.

“Do not fear” is **not** a command for those who might be physically tortured for their faith, something that is a long way from our experience as Christians. It is a **promise** that God will be with them.

It is **not** a command for those who might be economically challenged for their faith, say with the loss of a job. It is a **promise** that God will be with them.

It is **not** a command for those who face snide comments or exclusion for their speaking out or living their faith. It is a **promise** that God will be with them.

It is **not** a command to blithely and unemotionally go on when life is challenging. It is a reminder that we live in a fallen world, God sees us and is with us in difficulty, and God has a plan. It is a **promise** that God cares about us.

For God cares for all of his creation. Sparrows are little birds, offerings for the extremely poor, a source of food for those in poverty. Yet God care about them. That bird that mistakenly flies into your clear glass window and is stunned, injured, or killed? God doesn't will it or consent to it; we live in a fallen world; but God knows and God cares.

And every part of you? The example of the hairs of your head is even given here. God cares. Commentator Richard Donovan <sup>3</sup>shares: *In the Psalms, "the hairs of my head" is used as a metaphor for something too numerous to be counted. The disciples to whom Jesus is speaking would be familiar with those Psalms and would understand the significance of the Heavenly Father knowing the number of hairs on each of their heads. The God who cares for a small bird also cares about that the small things of our lives—even the hairs on our head. We are reminded of the new mother whose baby is so precious that everything about it seems wonderful—each finger and toe seems like a separate miracle. God loves us in that kind of detail.*

I often want explanations, as many of us do for why bad things happen. Think of the recent murder case against Brian Kohberger in Idaho. Why did he kill those persons? He wouldn't say.

I have come to the point now, however, where I don't fixate on the why questions. I focus on the this has happened, I don't know why. Now, what am I going to do about it? I trust in God's promise at that

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Donovan, "Biblical Commentary Matthew 10:24-39."

point that he cares and is with us. I am willing to live in the in-between time now.

Christ calls us and sends us out, but he warns us: he is sending us out as sheep among wolves. Preacher Will Willimon<sup>4</sup> concludes:

*And yet, here's some good news. Jesus calls us and gives us a bit part to play in God's world reclamation. If you've been blessed, now you are given the means to do something meaningful with your stuff. If you've got pain, you're given responsibility for someone else's pain, thus allowing you the freedom not to obsess on your own wounds. You are delivered from the burden of having to make up the significance of your life on your own. You don't have to work hard to choose yourself into the good life; in calling, assigning, utilizing you, Christ makes your life count.*

*Before you dismiss this Sunday's Gospel, ask yourself, "Why has God called me?" "Am I more courageous than I think?" "Might Jesus intend my life to be more interesting and demanding than I have demanded of myself?"*

*Christ came into the world, God's great "Yes," and the world responded with a violent "No!" Followers of Christ are sent into the world to give the world the news that it's God's world but the world*

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<sup>4</sup> Will Willimon, "Don't Be Afraid of Discipleship."

*responds by making discipleship downright sheep-amid-wolves dangerous. But don't be afraid!*

That is a promise.

Amen.